

LOS ANGELES TIMES
27 February 1985

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 13

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CIA Documents Link Mengele, Drug Dealing

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WASHINGTON—Dr. Josef Mengele, the notorious Nazi war criminal, may have been involved in South American drug trafficking in the 1970s and moved freely between Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil, according to declassified CIA documents released Tuesday by two Republican senators.

The reported involvement in drugs of Mengele, who would be 73 if still alive, could explain how he apparently was able to finance his life and travels in South America for years, according to one of the senators, Alfonse M. D'Amato of New York. One CIA document said Mengele may have used a farm machinery business in Paraguay "as a mechanism to move or launder large sums of money, as well as to cover the movement of illicit narcotics."

But the 28 heavily censored pages of long-hidden CIA records were often vague and inconclusive, D'Amato and Sen. Arlen K. Specter of Pennsylvania acknowledged at a news conference. Because many sentences were blacked out to conceal the CIA's sources of information about Mengele, it was difficult to determine what data in the documents might be credible and what might be rumor or hearsay.

'Not Very Diligent'

The CIA and other federal agencies "were not very diligent" in the past in pursuing leads about Mengele's activities, D'Amato and Specter said. But they said CIA officials are cooperating in the current Senate inquiry into the case of Mengele, known as the "Angel of Death" for his grisly medical experiments on Jewish women and children at the Auschwitz concentration camp in World War II.

Specter, referring to the documents, said: "They're vague, but that's the starting point for our investigation." The Justice Department also has undertaken a formal investigation into Mengele's overseas movements and into reports that U.S. Army occupation forces held him in temporary custody in Germany in 1947.

Some of the CIA documents and cables spoke of Mengele living at "a well-guarded ranch" and enjoying "the protection of Stroessner"—a reference to Paraguayan dictator Alfredo Stroessner. One memo said Mengele "had plastic surgery (and) looks younger" than his age.

D'Amato and Specter also released a letter that they have sent to Secretary of State George P. Shultz asking him to seek cooperation in the search for Mengele from all foreign governments that have been identified with his life as a fugitive. He is wanted for prosecution in West Germany and Israel.